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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: review of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)

Statement submitted by International Federation for Home Economics, Italian Centre of Solidarity, New Humanity and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2006/1.

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Statement

"Progress in eradicating poverty has been mixed. In many countries, the number of people living in poverty has increased since 1995. In many developing countries, social service provision has deteriorated, leaving many without access to basic social services ..." (see General Assembly resolution S-24/2, annex, sect. II, para. 10).

"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and deshumanizing conditions of extreme poverty to which more than a billion of them are currently subject" (see General Assembly resolution 55/2, sect. III, para. 11).

In Resolution A/RES/50/107 of January 1996, the General Assembly referred to the Observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and proclaimed the first United Nations decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006).

In December 1996, the General Assembly declared the theme for the Decade, as a whole, to be "Eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind" (General Assembly resolution 51/178).

Looking as far back as August 1974, the Bucharest World Population Conference regretted the fact that a considerable portion of the world population was living in regions of precarious food supply, that millions of its inhabitants were undernourished and that millions were faced with possible starvation (Report of the United Nations World Population Conference –19-30 August 1974 E/conf. 60/19).

In 1995, the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 6-12 March 1995) stated, in chapter 2 of its Programme of Action, that "over one billion people in the world live under unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing countries and particularly in rural areas of low-income Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the least developed countries".

Unfortunately, conditions today have not altered significantly, and there is still persistent widespread poverty in many countries of the world.

When considering the reduction and elimination of extended poverty, attention should be given to the fact that the social and economic phenomenon of poverty is particularly complex and dramatic in its effects on the families, which should be empowered by having their capacities and self-help potentials increased.

Throughout the world, war, poverty, natural disasters and economic crises are tearing families apart.

Although in many cases the family can provide a buffer against short-term poverty due to such causes as unemployment, illness and declining capacities of ageing members, long-term

poverty threatens the ability of families to meet the needs of their members and, ultimately, uproots entire families and causes the major dislocation of populations.

Poverty strikes more directly women with insufficient income who are living alone, women who lack resources to feed their family or women who are in charge of a sick or disabled member.

But in spite of strains and adversity, the family has proved resilient and a source of strength and inspiration for their members. Governments could do more to help families to adapt and thrive, so that they can fulfil their social, cultural, and economic roles. For the issue of the family not only involves individual families and their members but has a bearing on social cohesion and stability.

At the same time, family situations continue to change and diversify. Consequently, policies should be reviewed in an effort to keep abreast of changing family circumstances and a more comprehensive approach be taken to harmonize actions on behalf of families.

Families are main agents of sustainable development. Such development depends largely on the social, emotional, cultural and political maturity of all family members.

Recognition of the role families play in social development demands a comprehensive approach to issues such as the distribution of global resources, the eradication of poverty and assuring education and health for all in the context of a concept of human security.

Resolution S-24/2 of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly – quoted at the beginning of this document - recognizes that "the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration ... Greater attention should be paid to helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles, to the causes and consequences of family desintegration and to the adoption of measures to reconcile work and family life of women and men" (see General Assembly resolution S-24/2, annex, sect. III, para. 56).

The family should also be considered as an important element of social progress and development-related activities within the United Nations system.

In this context, while the follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is part of the agenda and the multi-year programme of work of the Commission for Social Development until 2006, the family, as the social entity directly involved in the problems affecting family members, should be maintained on the future agenda and programme of work of the Commission for Social Development as a core agent in social policy and development.